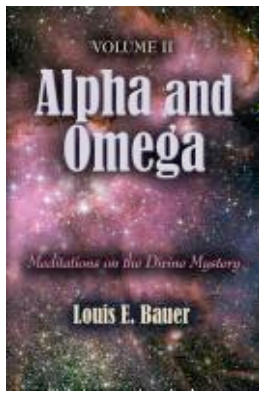


VOLUME II

Alpha and Omega

Meditations on the Divine Mystery

Louis E. Bauer



We scan the heavens for a sign of meaning. We need to know that we are not teetering on the edge of a lifeless abyss. The cosmos appears dark, unable to offer any hope. But the universe is embraced by the cross of Christ, the mysterious sign of the Divine, the infallible symbol of how much the divine mystery enlightens our lives with its unshakable love. These meditations offer comfort and hope to world-weary pilgrims.

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Chapter 47

The Great Fisherman's Net

Again, he said, the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind; when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all of this? They said to him, "Oh, yes, Lord!"

Matthew 13: 47-52

Did you understand this? I'm not so sure I did. In fact, I have a hunch that the disciples were up to their old tricks again, nodding their heads in agreement, hoping to hide their stupidity. Of course, they hadn't the foggiest notion of what Jesus was saying! One of the most distinguishable characteristics of the gospels is that the disciples, prior to Jesus's death, had not the vaguest idea what was going on. Even when a glimmer of light seemed to dawn on them, it was almost always shallow awareness taken at face value.

So if you kind of frowned when you read this parable of the net, a frown of incomprehension, then you are one solid step ahead of the first hearers of this rather weird parable. I have seldom preached on this strange parable, and whenever I have encountered it, I have simply let it slide on by without even a second glance. And weird it is—the parable has an ominous overtone of terrifying judgment which doesn't fit with all the joy of discovery which precedes it in Matthew's Gospel.

And what a strange way for Jesus to describe the reign of God—the reign of the love which moves the stars and planets on their courses and the love that broke its body on the cross of Golgotha. Rather, he describes the Kingdom of God as some big net thrown into the sea behind a boat, dredging the sea's depths. Jesus implies that this is how it will end. This is what the close of the age and the ultimate fulfillment of our lives will be like: a big old net dragging the vast reaches of the universe. Have you understood all this? Not until I read this parable carefully did I begin to understand—and it is

fascinating.

Nowhere in this little parable of the net are fish mentioned in the original Greek text! The Greek word for what the net catches means, simply, *every kind of thing*. The translators were the ones who decided that it was fish. And maybe some fish were caught in the net, some real prize winning beauties, but a lot of other stuff was caught up in that cosmic net, too, as it dipped into the sea of life. Flotsam and jetsam, seaweed and old discarded tires, a few balloon fish and puffers, some of the most uninviting creatures you might imagine—maybe even an eel. The net catches all kinds of things indiscriminately. But what a magnificent image of God Jesus paints, as virtually all of creation is caught up at the close of the age—at the end of time—in the divine net and dragged toward the silvery white beaches of eternity. No judgment is made between what is good or bad, useful or worthless. God’s net gathers up every kind and sort of thing. So don’t be surprised by who (or what) might be tangled in the net next to you.

And then what happens? When the net was full (and how much does it take to fill God’s net with everything that ever was or will be?), it was dragged to the beach. And isn’t the beach the best image of eternity? Then the men sit down and gather the good things and dispose of the bad things. And, suddenly, all we moralists and pietists, we do-gooders and believers in ourselves, jump up and clap because we are vindicated in our mistaken belief that we have something good to offer God. Certainly, our scales will glimmer and catch the eye of the Great Fisherman.

But that is wrong! The Greek words here about good things and bad things are not about morality. The words mean *beautiful* and *useful* and *purposeful* in the eye of the beholder. Something gets saved in the good bucket, not because it is morally good, but because it catches the fancy and delight of the Great Fisherman. He does the judging...and *only* at the end of time. So if you are the kind of person who goes around wondering whether you have any intrinsic worth, wondering whether you measure up or your life is worth anything, judging yourself and bad-mouthing yourself, take heart. The Great Fisherman won’t even begin judging that until the end of time. Nothing that you have to offer, or fail to offer, will matter. In other words, there are going to be many rusty anchors, discarded tires, broken lobster pots, and clumps of seaweed that delight the Great Fisherman. Therefore, don’t judge others, because the Great Fisherman has no intention of doing so until the net is finally dragged through time at eternity.

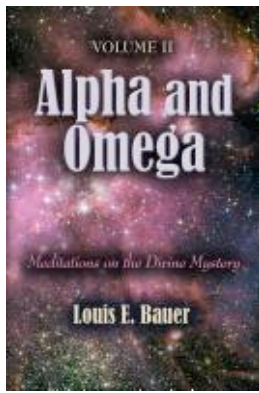
Simply take heart and remember that God sees the world—all the world including you and me and the rusty anchors and broken lobster pots—through

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the eyes of Jesus. That is how he looks at each one of us, and he sees beauty and worth which we often cannot even see in ourselves, unless we look through the penetrating lens of Jesus's cross.

But you say, "Aha! Look at how this story ends. Angels pitching the righteous into the bucket and the evil into the furnace of fire." Not very optimistic and encouraging is it? Well, how did the righteous get to be righteous? Simply by the free gift of Jesus's righteousness, offered to every human being simply for the taking. This is the gift of the relentless love of the Great Fisherman. And the unrighteous—how did they turn out so evil and get tossed from the great net into the fire? Even though they received Jesus's righteousness, they decided they just didn't like it. They couldn't stand the thought of not being accepted on their own personal merit or of relying upon the loving glint in the eye of the Great Fisherman.

So where are you going? And where is your life going? Into the bucket or the outer darkness? It will be one or the other, for the net of the Great Fisherman will gather us all in. There is nothing fishy about this deal you're offered—something for nothing. It took everything to make the deal, even the death of the Great Fisherman's Son. You are offered everything. Take it, for *God's* sake! He wants a big catch in his net when he goes on his final fishing trip.



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